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BACK OF THE FRONT

By PHYLLIS CAMPBELL

With an Introduction by

W. L. COURTNEY, M.A., LL.D.

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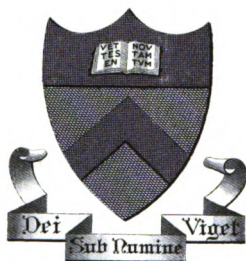
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INTRODUCTION

BY

W. L. COURTNEY, M.A., LL.D.

Every reader gives to a book as much as he takes away ; he decides on its merits in accordance with his own special predilections. I cannot therefore tell what impression this little volume may make on the general public ; I can only say that coming to it, so far as is possible without any bias or prejudice, I have found it a very pathetic and interesting record. But there is something more in it than its interest or its appeal to human sympathy. It is quite unpretentious and therefore convincing ; it is written wholly without arrière pensée and therefore bears its credentials on its very surface. I do not think that anyone who peruses these pages will fail to believe that a narrative so simple and sincere is precisely what it intends to be—a straightforward

account of certain poignant experiences undergone by a Scotch girl when she was nursing French and British wounded during the opening months of the Great War. But I may be permitted to say a few additional words. I have had the welcome opportunity of seeing the author and hearing from her own lips an account of similar incidents and experiences. I have been shown the various documents which prove that she was an accredited nurse with the French Red Cross. I have seen her photographs, her medals, her diploma and the insignia of her office. Above all I have read some of the numerous letters which she has received (and still receives) from her grateful patients in which the tale is told of a nurse's devotion and of her exceeding great reward. It is the more necessary for me to give this testimony, because I understand that some doubts have been expressed as to the credibility of a narrative which to my mind carries conviction from its first page to its last, and in reality requires no external proof. Of course it may be difficult in some cases to distinguish between memoranda taken at the time and the results of mere memory. But in the book before us the

authoress very evidently gives a picture of the impressions she gathered at the time—very vivid and unforgettable impressions, printed on a retentive brain during months of poignant suffering and strenuous and self-sacrificing service.

Frankly I do not know what to say about the “visions” which wounded soldiers narrated to Miss Campbell, as they have done also to other witnesses. She only tells the tales as they were told to her, and carefully avoids expressing any judgment on their merits or their veracity. Notice that she draws a distinction between the attitude of the early sufferers in the war, as they were brought back from the battle-field to her nursing-station, and that of the later arrivals. The former were dumb, stricken, paralysed; the latter seemed to have a rapt expression on their faces as though uplifted by some inner experience. It was the second of these two classes who for the most part referred, apparently with some shyness and reserve, to their belief in celestial aid. The French saw Joan of Arc—especially any who might come from the vicinity of Domrémy—and St. Michael; the English saw a warrior on a white horse whom they

identified with St. George. Mr. Arthur Machen in his imaginative story makes his soldier suddenly think of a figure of St. George seen on the plates of a restaurant, and so become aware of stout English bowmen fighting on his side. It is as easy to suppose that the image of the patron saint might have been remembered from the obverse of a sovereign. Anyhow some of these men saw, or thought they saw, a great light or a golden cloud, with a divine champion riding at their side and driving back the enemy. Let us leave it at that. It is a beautiful legend, far too beautiful to be vulgarised by rationalistic comment or a too inquisitive press. In moments of extreme nervous stress many men in history have seen visions or dreamed dreams and found a real inspiration therein. Shall we dare to tell them that they are the victims of a purely subjective delusion, when in the strength of their faith they have won the victory?

There is a curious comment which Miss Campbell records among these impressions of hers. "The English," she heard some critic remark, "have mercy without judgment ; the French have judgment without mercy." Expressed in this

epigrammatic form, the statement contains obvious untruth. Both English and French are civilised fighters who do not war with the wounded or the dead. One cannot imagine their indulging in such frantic orgies of lust and cruelty as have for ever tarnished the good fame of German soldiers. But the sentence aptly illustrates a certain difference in the temper in which French and English commenced this war. To our Allies the present war is the logical sequel of the campaigns of 1870. They remember or have been told of what their countrymen suffered more than forty years ago ; they discovered then the essential qualities of the Teutonic temperament : they knew how implacable and remorseless and brutal was the enemy with whom they had to deal. In a real sense therefore this great struggle is to them a war of righteous vengeance in which the strong arm and the pitiless heart must nerve themselves to deal summary execution on foes of the whole human race. We could not have the same feelings when the campaign began ; we had not the same experience. It was difficult in those early days for Englishmen to conceive what a German army was capable of.

Besides, our country had not been invaded : even now we do not know what it means to see English land trampled under the arrogant foot of an invader. The French know only too well and perhaps we too are gaining lessons which make mercy difficult. It is part of the dreadful business of the war that as the months go by, each with its catalogue of horrors, the temper of the combatants grows sterner. There seems no place for pity when men are fighting for their liberty and their lives.

It is the merit of Miss Campbell's book that it is full of pictures. She makes us see the little town and the forest through which the soldiers pass and the trains which come back with their loads of wounded. We get to know the men and the women by whose side she worked and whose gratitude she earned by her devotion. And the horizon is always lighted by ruddy fires and the ear is perpetually stunned by the ominous sound of approaching battle. The very atmosphere is tense with apprehension and suspense. Only five miles separated the nurses from the oncoming Germans in their desperate rush on Paris. Only by this slight interval was their safety won.

BACK OF THE FRONT

I

IN July, 1914, I was studying in Germany, and was looking ahead with much fortitude to the long days between July 3rd and August 7th, when my holiday would begin. Suddenly, and without apparent reason, my aunt arrived from Paris, and insisted on my return immediately. There was considerable unpleasantness in the school about my leaving, but Aunt Margaret is a very determined person, and on July 4th I was with her in Paris.

There I found matters rather melancholy owing to the illness of a member of the family. A friend who was going to England for a holiday, offered us the loan of his country house some distance from Paris, in the great forest, which stretched from Marly to Crèpy-en-Valois. Hither we removed ourselves, and shaking off

the restrictions of Paris life, ate, drank, and slept in the woodland and the gardens. The house was very old, a portion of it had been rebuilt in the time of Louis Quatorze—in that portion we lived. It was full of sunshine from morning till night. All the doors opened on the garden on one side and to the right of the house stood an immense tropical tree with a leaf like a maidenhair fern. Under the tree we had all our meals, facing the long vista of forest avenues, at that time dim with the multitude of fading spring flowers, for 1914 was a strange season in France, and the spring flowers were still blooming in the forest in July, while in Paris the streets were strewn with shrivelled leaves as if it were late October.

In the forest all was calm and peaceful. The trees murmured together like the sea, there was a wandering perfume from the undergrowth, and little odd snatches of bird songs. The people sang as they went to and fro. Even the train noises were modified into a sort of music—rushing through the greenness like the breaking of a great wave.

It was all so healing, so peaceful, so still, and the French smiled at our gipsy ways, but they liked them just the same, and they were all our friends. Especially old Peter—the forest ranger, who had fought through 1870, and carried a row of medals under the knitted coat Nancy made him—and Madame Dupont, his daughter, who was our concierge.

In the town at the end of the forest, on the Route de Paris, lived my dear old friend Madame D'A—— with her handsome old husband and her two sons. There also lived many other friends, just on the edge of the woodlands, in the great rambling old two-story houses of the Court of Louis Quatorze, all clustering round the chateau, with the old town, narrow-streeted and crooked behind them, and the Seine, with its two bridges, below.

Sometimes we made visits to the town and met the French officers of the garrison, and the pretty chic ladies, with their white faces and carmine-painted lips, looking like beautiful harmless vampires. They were so absolutely in the first cry, with their skirts slit above the knee,

B

showing a length of wonderful silk stocking and embroidery, and queer post-impressionist hats of indescribable shape and shrieking hues. Old Madame P—— was wont to declare the whole world was mad—the men were all immoral, the women unmoral and the fashions demoral. Indeed, looking back on that time, one sees France without religion or spirituality—almost without honour. There was no honour in private life—between man and woman. In political life—in art the note had become hysterical. In literature there was an entire lack of reticence, and a cultivated impurity. One hated to agree with the wearisome repetition of the German opinion—“France is corrupt,” but dearly as I love France, I thought that was possibly true.

“*Ma Petite!*” Madame D’A—— explained, “when a man is humiliated he gets drunk to forget. When a great nation is humiliated, it is the same. France is only forgetting. But hearken well, when the time comes she will be sober enough. *Sapristi!* Yes!”

And in those days wherever one went, there

were Germans—all saying France was decadent, without a soul. After all, how could Germany be blamed for her mistake? The soul, the spirit, *seemed* dead—only the body was manifest, demanding that all its needs be fed and all its appetites satisfied.

We talked much in those days in the forest, and we all agreed that “something must happen.” The cool winds died away, and a still, sudden heat descended on us. The sky became a kind of thick greyish blue, low over the treetops, so low it seemed to absorb all sounds. The leaves dried and fell, and the flowers faded in the garden. It was as hot as Aden, dry, lowering and exhausting. It sucked the energy out of the bones and made the mind as flabby as a sponge. The paint streamed off the pretty ladies’ lips, and the powder caked on their pale cheeks. The men mopped themselves, and were too feeble to curse the heat.

And so dawned Saturday, the 1st of August. A low, dull, brooding, smoky day, under a canopy of silence.

Madame D’A—— came over in the morning

and took us home with her in the car to déjeuner.

“ My little English ones,” she said, “ I know not exactly what is the matter with me. It is perhaps my liver. But I am suffering with a great uneasiness. I feel as if an earthquake were about to happen. What absurdity ! Yet I feel it. So please be cheerful. Let us laugh ! ”

We were in the music room with Jean, and they immediately danced the wildest and most diverting *pas de deux* to the gramophone, and we all laughed immoderately. But when we had laughed the earthquake feeling was still there, and it lay heavy on us all.

It was Saturday afternoon and all Paris was disposing itself on the terrace ; the space before the chateau was choc-a-bloc with automobiles, the band was playing in the chateau gardens—all the world was languidly flirting, laughing, jesting.

Two men—a tall handsome young soldier in uniform, and another old enough to be his father—turned and followed us the whole length of the terrace.

Madame D'A—— bubbled with laughter at our annoyance.

“Look, my little ones!” she cried, “it is only that they would pay you a compliment.” We had come to the end of the terrace, and turning suddenly we faced the two men, and stood. The young soldier snatched off his cap and bowed, the elderly man, hat in hand, advanced a step. Madame D'A—— put up her lorgnette.

“Gentlemen——”

Suddenly into the murky thickness of the afternoon burst the ringing of the old church bell—such a strange ringing!

“Clank! Clank! Clank!”

Madame D'A—— reeled a step back, the soldiers came suddenly to attention, the old man seemed to become rigid, the people on the terrace came to a sudden halt. Whatever any one was doing he or she froze in the act. All animation seemed smitten into abeyance by that dreadful bell.

“The tocsin!”

The next instant we were all flying along the path to the church. On the church steps stood

a man with a drum, the sticks suspended in his fingers. His face was as white as marble, and his black eyes looked out of it with a kind of furious anticipation—joy yet terror. The bell ceased and the drum began; for about sixty seconds it rolled out its imperative summons over the heads of the gaily clad crowd of pleasure-seekers, all silent now. In dead silence, over the motionless crowd the drum throbbed out.

In the road the trains had come to a stand-still and the carts halted where they stood, the automobiles, drays, vans, the spell of silence had fallen on them all.

Suddenly the drum stopped and in a high clear triumphant note the man began to declaim.

He finished; brought the drumsticks down again, in a long roll, descended the steps and was gone. In utter silence the crowd melted away, not a word of comment, not a sound of acclamation, protest or approval. They were all gone and with them all that old world we knew. There, at that moment, died "corrupt"

France and under the hot grey August sky leaped in silence into being France Regenerate, Immortal, Splendid.

“Germany has declared war against us and her troops have already invaded our soil.”

II

WE saw the whole French army go past us—horse, foot and guns. The first troops went on Sunday night at midnight. And there in the saddle we saw for the first time that new and splendid France, before whom as before Belgium, the whole world bows in admiration, in respect.

It was midnight, but all the world was on the Route de Paris to bid them "God speed." The pavements were crowded with fathers, mothers, sisters, lovers and brothers, and again there was that strange all-absorbing silence. There was no chatter, no weeping, no comment. In silence the Cuirassiers came out of the great barrack yards, still and straight and soldierly. Many of these men were known to us. One was our baker, another the son of a multi-millionaire, another a priest, and another old Peter's second son ; yet these grave, noble faces

had all a likeness to each other that was very remarkable. It was the expression I had seen on the face of the drummer on the church steps, a kind of exultation, a fierce joy. We too were speechless in face of it. It was as if these great knightly men were each exulting inwardly at the prospect before them. They were going out to wipe the stain of conquest from off them. They had found themselves. France was suddenly stripped bare to the soul, and behold ! the soul was a pure white light of knightly splendour. Now in silence they departed to lay down their lives for France.

Horse and foot and guns, the army poured through the forest, night and day, day and night, for three weeks. The forest throbbed with the reverberation of marching feet, with the rattle of guns and waggons and the trains were like the breakers on a coral reef. And still there was that low, grey, dull weather—a threatening storm that never burst.

Madame D'A—— came and bore off Nancy and myself to a course of surgical nursing. There was nothing else to do. The government

had taken everything on wheels, all the trains were needed for the mobilisation. If you wanted to go to Paris, you must needs go on foot. We could go nowhere beyond our own physical powers, so we went with "Latty," as we called her, and bandaged a dummy or each other, and learned how to sterilise things, and to use certain surgical instruments and to wait on the surgeon at imaginary operations. Alas! Alas! we wondered in those days at ourselves. We were like all the world, changed into something—new and very strange.

Then one morning Latty came with the Commandant and her sweet face was all puffed with weeping and her eyes strange.

"Oh, my little English!" she said. "I have come to demand your help. You are so cool, you English, you keep your heads—yet it is so dreadful——"

"It is so dreadful a thing—still, the Commandant wishes me to be careful. Will you come with me to A—— and succour the refugees?"

She looked at us with her great eyes bloodshot

with weeping—very earnestly. “It is that I trust you, dears,” she added, “they are—— Oh, they are terrible, these poor things. They have nothing—naked most of them, wounded—homeless. God have mercy on brave Belgium!”

Aunt Margaret gave a little cry and Latty caught her hands. “We will not think of it, my friend,” she said stoutly. “Come, girls. Let us be moving!”

We thrust on our hats, the Commandant handed us into the car and we whizzed off through the forest. We noticed all manner of queer things in among the trees. The Commandant laughed grimly.

“Ah, yes!” he said. “If the Boches get here, we will welcome them warmly.”

So there was a possibility that the Germans, who were now driving out the poor Belgians, might some time not too far off, come there, and stream down the forest aisles on into the quaint old town over the rivers. It seemed hardly credible. It was all so dream-like and stagey. Twice on the road we came up to a barricade built from the forest to just within the middle of

the road, where the ends met and passed each other, leaving a space in the middle just enough to scrape through.

“ The Pass-word ? ”

“ The pass-word was the name of a town. Then came the demand for the countersign. The Commandant came over and the man came close to him, looking straight at me. He was a man I knew well, the son of an immensely wealthy American woman who had married into one of the noblest families in France.

He drew himself up and saluted, standing at attention till the car came through. I looked at the car itself, it was packed with bottles of wine, tea, coffee and bread and tightly bound bundles of old linen and clothes.

“ There is a post of the Association here,” said Latty as we drew up, “ and I am making you *Ambulancières Auxiliaires*.”

That was all. A soldier stood at the outside of the platform—at its end was a little detachment of soldiers—more soldiers were on guard at different points where the roads debouched from the forest.

The forest faced the narrow platform, and outside it lay behind. The railway lines came gleaming in the dull heat from between the tall trees on one side and vanished again into the greenwood from the other.

Huddled together at the very end of the platform was a company of children of different ages, and sitting with his back to the wall was an old man with a little boy of about five in his arms. Latty knelt down beside him and talked to him soothingly, but the old man made no sign he had heard her. Every now and again he would pat the child's back with a shrivelled hand as if to make sure he was there—staring blankly in front of him the while. Suddenly his arms relaxed and he fell sideways down, and the child rolled over, but the child's body fell one way and its little golden dusty head another—it was almost severed from its body. For one moment I felt as if I were walking on air and that the top of my head was lifting and falling on again—then I was horribly sick. Two soldiers carried the bodies away.

Latty took me by the arm and brought me

back to where the girls were all huddled together.

“Now, *chérie*,” she said. “All the children have run away from the *sales Boches*—they are to be washed and clothed. Quick now, there will be another train in an hour and all must be ready.”

Nancy and I—we scrubbed and washed and clothed them. They were like automata, petrified with terror and grief. Some of them were covered with burns and bruises, some of them wept incessantly, some were dumb and some a little mad—and they had all been through the hands of the Germans. Aunt Margaret could not answer me when I spoke to her, and we avoided each other’s eyes. Nancy worked in a kind of frenzy. When we got through with the girls we scrubbed out the waiting-room, and the ladies of the Post made their appearance—about half a dozen—with Madame L—. They were not very pleased to see us, and one of them approaching Latty, demanded *why* “*Les Anglaises*” were brought there. Latty nodded her handsome head.

“Listen, my friend,” she said, “you will be glad enough of the English before we are done with the Boches—believe me.”

The protest died away, and said Latty to me, apropos of nothing at all, “All is not well—also—there is evil work in Alsace. Here I will tell you a strange thing. You must understand Joan of Arc was born on the land of my ancestors—and she has been seen there in Domrémy—and that means great trouble for France.”

Just then the expected train came in. We were feeling sick and giddy from our first contact with the war. But this train bore such a load of horrors that nothing in the world could be added to it.

Aunt Margaret put her hands to her head and stood for a moment as if steadying herself—then she entered a waggon and I followed Latty, carrying the surgical instruments and bandages—and for an hour and a half I followed her through hell.

In one waggon, sitting on the floor, was a naked girl of about twenty-three or four—one of her suffering sisters, more fortunate than the

rest in possessing an undergarment, had torn it in half and covered up the front of her poor body ; it was saturated with blood from her cut-off breasts—on her knees, under her blistered hands, lay a little baby—dead.

There were women covered with sabre-cuts, women who had been whipped, women all burnt alive in escaping from their blazing homes. Old men and children—little boys maimed in the hands and feet, their wounds done up in sacking, or any kind of old rag.

Many of these women and men were again a little mad. They could tell no story—only that they had escaped the Boches, and they were not sure if it were a good thing for them they had done so.

Their fear and suffering hung in the level air—as they ate and drank, mechanically. The soldiers resting on their rifles, looked on with brooding eyes. What ~~and~~ this all mean in regard to them, and *their* women and children ? In the grey heat their faces looked grey. All the time there was a rush of movement on the lines on the other side of the platform, where countless

waggon^s were running through—trains with Belgian names on them ; and some of them had little round holes in them all around the doors and windows. What now, would that mean ? Then we remembered in that kind of frozen dulness through which everything came, that the Germans were occupying Belgium.

Another train of refugees came rushing in, and again we were occupied with washing babies, and women, and old people, and feeding them—with wounds and burns and scourged backs—and maimed little boys—and so on till the night came and we went back with Robert in the car, leaving the stench of blood and wounds and scorched flesh and the crying of the children behind us for a while.

“ *Sapristi !* ” was Latty’s only comment.
“ *Sapristi !* ”

Robert had some odd news. The wife of the Commandant of a great military centre had disappeared on the 2nd of August. She had been taken prisoner on the French frontier with all the plans of the mobilisation on her. She had been brought back to her home.

"What will they do with her?" asked Nancy.

Robert smiled. "She has already been done with," he said. "A week ago. She was a German."

"But——" I protested feebly. "She was married to a great man. Her position——"

"Mademoiselle," said Robert, "there is this to be said for France, a high position has never stood between crime and justice. We would just as soon shoot a German princess for espionage as a milk-seller. They are all deadly—so we destroy them all, men and women alike, when we catch them like that."

"Poof!" laughed Latty. "We take them out every morning and shoot them in the cemetery. That is the best place for Germans—underground in the cemetery. I must go to the chemist's," she went on. "Take us there, Robert."

We went on to the town of "Our Lady in the Cradle," and as we went the men were streaming up the narrow Route de Paris to the Barracks, each French soldier carrying his own outfit,

which he buys himself. All these men carried the same—a pair of boots, a pair of slippers, a flannel belt or vest and two changes of under-clothing, with such little odd things as he might afford in extras. High and low they streamed along, in that curious, dull silence—almost apathetic, which marked this time.

Latty got out at the street corner, and I stood outside the chemist's shop looking up to the Barracks. Presently came along two people I knew—a fine, grave, big man of twenty-three or so—a good-tempered, handsome giant—one of the forest guards and his little young wife—they had been married eight months. One arm clutched his bundle, the other was round his little wife's waist—and as she walked she now and again buried her pretty face on his sleeve—a little round baby face, as white as snow—yet smiling.

At the corner of the Barrack he paused, and I saw him lift her off her feet as if she were a child and lay her across his broad breast, then he put his cheek on her soft hair and I could see his lips moving. Then I turned away from the holiness

of that parting and hid my face. When I looked again they were standing at the Barrack gates. He stooped and kissed her and went in. For a little while she stood looking—then as if not very sure of herself she took a little step backwards—then another—then she turned and ran like the wind to the place where he had lifted her—suddenly she flung her arms up in the air, and stood with face upturned, swaying a little, then she laid her head on the wall and cried and cried. I pointed her out to Latty. “No,” said Latty. “Comfort her! My God, what an idea! Let her be proud to have given her splendid man for France.”

We walked to the station for a paper and stood waiting there till the boy would arrive on his bicycle. While we waited we saw a very familiar figure standing by the pavement—a man with a tray of nuts suspended round his neck. He was a tall, soldierly figure of a man—distinguished in appearance but shabby and soiled to a degree. Gossip said he was an English officer who had been ruined by a famous Paris actress. For seven years he had stood between the

chateau and the church selling nuts—never looking one in the face, never speaking. As we watched him, suddenly from among the soldiers came a typical Paris gamin—ragged, hatless, impudent and barefooted—evidently drunk. He reeled on the edge of the pavement and cannoned against the seller of nuts whose wares were flung broadcast by the contact. Instead of apologising he thrust a hand through his hair and said something in *argot*—and there was a roar from the soldiers. The seller of nuts looked wizened with rage—and his retort, when it came, was bitingly satirical. The gamin wheeled round and spat in his face—and, like a flash, the seller of nuts became a soldier—an officer—a gentleman—a spy! The soldiers closed round him—that volley of horrible cursings was in pure high German. The gamin was a famous French detective and the seller of nuts a Prussian nobleman, an officer of high rank.

We walked back through the town. In the market place a great crowd of women were wrecking the shop of a German milk company. Foremost among the wreckers was Georgette,

who keeps a little shop for antiques and with whom I had many pleasant dealings. She saw me over the heads of the crowd and hailed us.

“ Well arrived, Anglaises ! ” she cried. “ When do you come to fight the Boches ? ”

“ We are fighting now, Georgette, ” I assured her.

“ Ah—well done ! ” She turned and drove her clenched fist through the glass of the window and the blood poured over the pounds of butter. Georgette took them up and flung them into the crowd. “ Behold ! ” she cried. “ This is how France pays for all she gets from Germans. With blood, my friends ! ”

There was an uproar that filled the street—and the whole crowd seemed to fall on the “ Lait Maggi.” Next day when I saw it it was an empty shell.

Again we drove through the forest to the Post and passed a day of horror—and then quite suddenly across it came a gleam of sunshine. A packed train came to a standstill at the platform, but instead of miserable refugees, its doors were flung open to a hurtling avalanche of gay tartans.

The Highland reevers descended on the Post and in every dialect of Bonnie Scotland demanded food and drink.

They flowed over the bales and bundles, and into the little kitchen and canteen, bore off everything they could lay their hands on. I met a big kiltie with a ham clasped to his bosom—and told him he really must not steal the stores. He looked surprised.

“Guid sakes, lassie!” he cried. “Can ye speak English? Well, would ye git me a knife——” and, still hugging the ham, he put an arm round Latty and kissed her affectionately—an example followed by his companions.

One of the ladies of the Post, a very dignified old countess, voluble as the clacking of a mill, was silenced in the same fashion. The Highlanders kissed all the old ladies and Aunt Margaret, who alternately stamped with rage and laughed. Then they all scrambled back into the carriages carrying the loot with them and laughing, singing and blowing kisses, disappeared into the forest. Nancy wiped her eyes and pinned

a "Seaforth" broach into my dress—the badge of my grandfather's regiment. It was strange to look on the white linen of the Croix Rouge. Grandfather fought devils and died in the Mutiny—these men were on their way to meet devils whose most casual thoughts were worse than all the cruelties India ever thought of.

"And who are these Scotch? Tell me," demanded the countess furiously.

"Listen." Latty took her by the apron. "I will tell you. The Scots are a species of English who wear petticoats."

"Oh, mon Dieu! What a people!" cried the countess. "Petticoats, *par exemple!* I thought they were wild women."

"Ah, well!" sighed Latty. "I think they are all thieves. But oh, my God! How charming!"

We had no more troops after the Highlanders, but scores and scores of Belgian trains, some of them had been on fire, and some with great holes in them. We did not like at all the look of those Belgian trains—though in the strange apathy that fell on us again after the departure of the

Highlanders, nothing seemed to matter. We said nothing to each other as we walked along through the forest, and avoided each other's eyes. Aunt Margaret looks so thin and frail, I always wonder at her—but at that time more than ever. Cooking, scrubbing, washing sheets and children's clothes, mopping up great red stains, washing the unspeakable filth off the poor victims of German vice and brutality—and Nancy too—what queer things women are! What things they don't do and won't do—till the time comes, and then what heroic stands they make.

At the end of the road an old man was coming along between two big beautiful horses. He was leading them with a little bit of rope, and talking as he came, the tears pouring down his old face. The horses had their heads inclined inwards as if paying great attention, and every now and then they would nozzle over his head on into his neck. Suddenly he stopped and flung his arms round one and kissed it passionately, then the other. "Oh, my friends!" he wept, "my dear, good friends—and we are parted." He threw his

right hand up to the sky. “ Oh God ! ” he cried,
“ punish that infamous William.”

And that crystallised the dumb wonder that
gnawed in my heart.

“ Where was God ? ”

III

Now the people began to stand in groups in the street telling each other things that had happened in Belgium and in Alsace-Lorraine. A little wave of black began to creep along the ways where people went, and no one smiled. The theatres were shut, there was no dancing, no singing, and one was forbidden to play the piano. There was the ever-present, ever-brooding heat and the silence. The people went quietly, men and women, each having an appointed task, which was one part of the great mechanism of war. Every man, woman and child was fighting the Germans—doing it seriously and well. The women who were not making bandages, or taking the “course” for the Croix Rouge, were carrying on their husbands’ or fathers’ business. They became grocers, and coal merchants and brokers, and butchers, and they did all these

things well because the Frenchwoman is essentially a woman of affairs and invariably successful. In Paris all the dressmakers and milliners closed their shops. There was no money and no one could buy "vanities." The little boys became orderlies or messengers, or anything that was necessary, and little girls began to do the marketing. Raoul, our friend Madame P——'s second son, passed days in the forest collecting leaves, and the women at the hospitals made them into pillows. It was in a way amusing to see the exquisite Raoul working and dripping with perspiration, wheeling a handcart to and from the forest, packed with sacks of dry leaves.

Old Pierre, the forest ranger, collected leaves also, and often he would meet us on our way back from the town with the *Matin* or *Le Journal*, and come in for a cup of coffee. It was so peaceful in the early morning about 5.0 or 5.30 going into the town—it was difficult to realise that hidden around us were all the signs of war. The Armageddon of the world. What time Pierre rose to collect leaves I never knew,

he always had a load collected by 5.0. Pierre had five sons all serving, and he himself had fought in 1870. When he talked of 1870 he became another man. Watching him I began to understand the flame of hatred for Germany that smouldered in every brave French heart.

One morning he had strained his wrist, so he let me help him to push the cart, and as we went he told me about "*soixante-dix*."

"Mademoiselle," he said, "you would not think to look at me now, how big I was in *soixante-dix*. But I am good still. 'Little and good,' Madame says. Very true! I shall live to kill more Boches—and that is great happiness. Listen! In *soixante-dix* we were falling back on Paris, and I was with my regiment at Place de la Defense. My home, you see, was in Marly, where my father also was ranger. I was hungry, and there was no food, no coffee even, unhappily! So I crawled out to the forest, and got home thinking my mother would feed me well. Bon Dieu! What a hunger that was, and cold! *Allons!* I arrive at my home and what do I see? A pig of a fat German struggling with my

little sister Marie, and my old mother dead in her blood on the floor. Remark well, mademoiselle, I had only the bayonet (there was no ammunition), but I soon finished with the Boche. Then Marie took his heels and I his head, and we planted him in the fosse. The fosse is an excellent place for Germans, alive or dead. Then at last I had something to eat, and Marie and I stole away through the German lines, and I got her to Paris."

He wiped the beads of dampness off his face. "She died of hunger, the little Marie," he sighed. "Have you heard, mademoiselle, that many of the dead who died in *soixante-dix* are walking about here in the forest? They say it is to warn us that the Germans are coming again."

"Oh, Pierre!" I cried. "Do you really think they will come here again? With England, Russia and France against them?"

"*Ecoutez*, mademoiselle," he said impressively. "A wise man once said to me this—the Germans are to Humanity what lice are among insects. Look now, whatever country you turn to who has all the trade, all the wealth,

all the power? why, naturally the Germans. *Ils sont partout!* In England more than anywhere, I am told. Well, my five sons will kill at least five each, perhaps the youngest will kill more. He is a devil, that one. But note this well, mademoiselle, they cannot all be killed—and *they are now not far off*. Go now, into the town to-day and buy what you can, for when they come they take everything, and one may quite well starve."

When I got home I found the old Countess de ——'s shabby old carriage at the door. Inside she was talking slowly and without great excitement to Aunt Margaret. The Germans were already in France, we were retreating quickly on Paris. For her part she would buy stores and remain in the old chateau. It had been looted in *soixante-dix*, so there was nothing to tempt them, she had no money, no pretty daughters. Her sons were all fighting. "Go, madame," she concluded, "and buy bread and toast it. One can always live on bread and water. I did in Paris during the siege—just bread and water."

“Very well,” said Aunt Margaret. “I suppose I must get something.”

They set off in the ramshackle old trap, and returned together in the evening with a load of long loaves. The prospect of bread and water did not appeal greatly to either Nancy or myself, so we suggested a visit to Our Lady in the Cradle on our own. When we got there the streets were packed with shoppers, everybody buying what they could. The principal shop in the town was closed. The government had taken possession and one could buy only a kilo of anything at the others. Thus one could have a kilo of coffee, rice, jam, flour, etc., but no more. It struck me we might buy a kilo at each shop, but curiously enough everybody had the same bright idea. However, an old friend of mine, the fruit-seller in the Rue de Pain, went in at the grocer's back door next to hers and demanded what we desired.

“Les Anglaises *must* have it,” she insisted, so the grocer, protesting if it were known he would be fined, gave us what we wanted.

Her husband had got forty-eight hours' leave, and he was raving about the English.

"The English are splendid! And, bon Dieu! they *are* gay—look you, Mees, it is hardly to be believed, but they go out joking and singing—there is a song of your country "Tipa-rar-ee." They sing it all the time—and they have little knives to cut the throats of the Boches. I assure you, ladies, I love the English. They shared 'jam' with me and beef. Oh, they are all gentlemen. I would not have believed it, *malheureusement* that they speak no French, and we no English. Otherwise we are as brothers."

As we staggered up the streets with our load of provisions we met a little company of soldiers. They halted and looked at us.

"You are not Americans?" they inquired.

"Not much! British!" we replied.

Immediately they set upon the basket and shared round its contents, while we looked on in dismay. Then with their caps in hand they asked us to show them the way, and they carried the things home. Then they placed everything

D

tidily in the kitchen and shook hands one after the other with great solemnity.

Immediately after their departure, Madame D'A—— drove up and took us to the Post. She had been crying again. The Germans were in Domrémy, she said, and she told me a terrible story of a little boy of five years old who had been forgotten where he was playing in the street, when the Germans came in. He had a little wooden gun, this child, and as the German troops rolled in, he pointed the toy at the leader, and the officer shot him dead.

That afternoon Captain P—— came with a great basket of peaches for us, and told me another story about a boy in the same country. The French, as they fell back, were so few that they had to hide their guns, and by delaying some were taken prisoners. One of the men had his son with him, a boy of fourteen, and when the men refused to give up the hiding-place of the guns, the officer put a rifle into the boy's hands and told him he might go free if he would shoot his father. The boy held the gun in his hands and looked very long at the officer who

urged him to shoot. "Shoot!" he said, "and I will make you a good German."

The boy lifted the gun and shot the German clean through the head.

"There," said the father, "you have made a good German of him." There is nothing more to that story.

The countess was in mourning that day, her face under the heavy crape a mask of tiny crisscrossing lines. She never stirred, sitting in the canteen, her slim hands crossed on her knees, and eyes seeing nothing. Madame D'A—— drew me to the end of the platform.

"I may as well tell you, somebody else will if I don't. The General is dead. He was wounded in the last engagement, and he offered up his sword when he was surrounded thinking *They* were human. But they *sawed his head off* with his own sword. They were devoted friends, the countess and her husband. She will die if she goes on like that."

I was sick with horror; what devils they were, these Germans. How had they lived in the world so long and concealed this passionate

cruelty and brutality? Not but what I remembered many things I had been told in the past, by people who had seen the German administration in their colonies. Dreadful devilish things like these.

The women at the Post had very little to say to each other that day. We walked home with Madame P—— and Raoul, and I told Raoul about Joan of Arc at Domrémy. Raoul was very satirical. He is a Huguenot, and saints displease him. He said he would believe if, when he went to the front, he saw her. Then he proceeded to tell me that things were very bad up towards the German frontier, and that the people, *the women* of France, were not at all pleased with the government and presently it would go out. Indeed there were rumours that it was out—and another government, not pro-German, in office. There were to be changes in the army too—all had been wrong. It was rumoured French's orders had not been delivered to him in time and that the whole French and British armies were in retreat.

“ I assure you, Mees, what I tell you is true.

But it may be all will yet be well. Joffre is a very strong man and he is not like French with a lawyer to command him. Hein! I think that is a comical thing that your army must take orders from a lawyer, and your navy also from a civilian very droll! But lawyers manage all your public affairs, don't they? and they are all pro-Germans. I bought in Paris a paper before the English came in. Is the editor of that paper a German also? If he were in France I know what we would give him."

Nancy was so diverted at the idea of bringing a pro-German paper to judgment that she laughed aloud. And instantly Madame P—— and Raoul both said "Hush!" as if we were in church, and we felt so ashamed.

Captain P—— came out of one of the avenues and joined us and inquired why we were so grave, it not being my custom to cultivate either silence or gravity. Nancy explained to him, adding that she was rather ashamed of her mirth, but she could not help it.

P—— shook his head. "Well, it really is

a very serious matter for us," he said, "this English affection for the Boches. See how they can frustrate our plans at every turn. They are everywhere, they take everything, they sell you before your faces, and yet you think them still friends—you are a strange people! *We know* the Boches. Listen, I have a pavilion at C—— overlooking the river on one side, and the bridges, and on the other the main line to Paris. I let it five years ago to a German, and he asks me when he took it, if he may lay down a concrete tennis court. I agree. Yes, why not? And he makes a tennis-court, very good and strong. Very well, there is war, and I think I will see to my house. I arrive unexpectedly, and walk in, my tenant is an enemy you see. So I surprise him greatly. He thinks I am with my regiment. I find him replacing a little movable side to the tennis-court. When he is safely put away (my tenant) I investigate. We take out all the side of the tennis-court and *voilà*, two gun emplacements. Excellent! We seek further, and just on the edge of the forest, well padded in cases and packed in wool—the

guns. Still further in the cellars—the ammunition. What do you think? It was quite a profitable thing letting my house to a German?”

“Oh, La! La!” commented Madame P——.
“It might not have been.”

“That was what I myself thought,” explained the Captain. “So I went soon.”

“Well, the Germans are pretty nearly cleared out now,” said Raoul. “But I got one at the station this morning. He was buying a paper—and he wanted the *Daily Mail*. I had a good look at him. So I say in German, ‘Why do you buy an English paper, my friend?’ He turns quite green. ‘I am an Englishman,’ he says. ‘You are?’ I say. ‘Then come with me to my good friend the Commissaire of Police, he loves the English.’” Raoul rubbed his smooth chin reflectively.

“He ran quite well—for a Boche,” he said.

“Did you get him?” inquired P——.

“The police were fishing him out of the river when I left,” said Raoul.

“ Did you throw him in the river ? ” asked Nancy in horror.

“ It was the only way to stop him,” explained Raoul. “ Then I sent the police. It is quite fortunate I found him. They were going to blow up the bridge to-day.”

The P——s turned down towards the town, and Captain P—— came on with us. He is a very tall man, with a long clear-complexioned face, and blue eyes. He was educated at an English Public School, and is about the finest type of Frenchman we have met. Gentle, kind and chivalrous, yet as brave as a lion.

“ To-day,” he said in his lazy English, “ is your birthday, is it not, mademoiselle ? ”

Yes—it was my birthday, sandwiched between the evil news from East and West.

“ I have proposed myself to dinner,” said Captain P——, “ I will grill the chicken and peel the potatoes.”

When we reached the pavilion we found Captain P—— had brought a great basket of fruit—peaches, nectarines and great yellow plums, and a basket of wines for the Post,

out of which he took a bottle of champagne to drink my health. We had no one to help in the house now, we did all the work ourselves, and Aunt Margaret the cooking. We liked doing everything, it left us less time to think.

When our meal was cooked we sat down, and the others solemnly drank my health, and scarcely had we put down the glasses when Madame D'A——'s car came hooting to the door and she was in the room.

"Come children, quickly, quickly," she said, "there is a train of wounded. You also, Captain, quick."

As we climbed into the car, Pierre thrust a letter into my hand. I opened and read it as we went along. It was from the English lady whose husband owned the pavilion.

"I hear," she wrote, "the Prussians are marching on Paris. It may not be true—it is a very serious matter for us because I cannot get back to my house. Will you please put all the silver in the Bank, and hide away anything of value, lock the linen-press, and the china-closet, and will you carefully put away the

gardening tools—*especially take care of the garden hose*. Put them all in the shed and lock the door, and let me have a postcard when they are safely put away. Also give my maid Marie a room in the house with her child. You might look after the child for her and let her have all the stores. She is very nervous, so she will not be able to do any housework for you. Dear-me ! This war is so upsetting.”

“ I suppose,” remarked Captain P——, “ she takes it for granted *you* will all be safe. I notice she makes no inquiry.”

“ Well,” remarked Latty. “ It may be the good old German God will look after her garden hose, the Boches seem to be collecting all kinds of useful things this time.”

“ Listen ! ” said Aunt Margaret with uplifted finger.

“ An aeroplane,” Captain P—— informed us. “ Listen—— Taube—— ? ”

It was too dark to see, we could only hear the great thing circling round and round in great sweeping curves.

Then came a blinding flash and an explosion

followed by a perfect fusillade from every part of the forest. Captain P—— nodded wisely.

“Ah! It is the junction, of course. They do not know that Raoul got the confederate this morning.”

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IV

IN my childhood and up till last year, I have had a sort of recurring nightmare. I used to dream I was standing in a little lonely station in a forest, waiting for a train—the railway line ran out of the forest on one side, and into it again on the other—and I waited for something. Something terrible, and harmful, that was to arrive at the platform. Presently a train would come creeping, creeping, out of the dark trees towards me, and as it came a sound would run before it of sobbing and wailing—a sound so terrifying that I would wake dripping with terror, and shriek for protection.

On this night of my birthday I had all the feeling of that dream. There was a *majeur* in charge of the Post and several assistants in addition to the *ambulanciers* and a long table on trestles stood between the little waiting-room and the canteen. There were piles of shrouded

bandages, utensils, and sterilisers, and rows of bottles and basins. We were given little paper lanterns, such as are used for the decorations of Christmas trees, and told to light them when the train came in—there was no other light allowed—and in the meantime there was the moonlight.

The heat was intense—it was unnatural heat, it made even thinking impossible, perhaps fortunately. Raoul stood beside me, and gave me his good wishes, and while he talked I saw the train of my dreams come slowly crawling, creeping out of the forest towards the platform, and before it came a low awful crying—inarticulate and wild. All the blood in my body seemed to leap into my head, and I turned to fly—anywhere—anywhere away from that crying.

Raoul laid a hand on my arm, and I came back to myself. He lit my lantern and his own, and I moved to Latty's side as the train came to a standstill.

The train was made up of cattle boxes, heaped with men. Some of the doors were shut to, and a red stream oozed slowly under them. Others were open with a little straw here and there *over*

the wounded. As the train drew up before us Latty and I were facing an open waggon. At one side of the door sat a soldier who had lost both his legs, he was supporting a boy whose arms were gone, both were bleeding copiously and unconscious—and as I followed Latty with the *pansement* box, the cry of the wounded resolved itself into words. “*A boire! A boire! A boire!*” “A drink! A drink!”

In all the horrors of that night the cry for water clings most in my memory. How long these poor shattered soldiemen had been lying there, heaped up, many dying with the dead, we never knew. Nor did we even know from whence came that first terrible load of suffering.

At sight of them most of the Post had fled. But Latty, who had the blood of heroes in her veins, showed them what the woman of the old French Noblesse is made of. Her big eyes brimmed over once, and it was done with, this was no time for tears or fears. Nothing dismayed her, and at her order I became like herself. Climbing into waggons ankle-deep in blood and bandaging hideous wounds almost in

the dark, giving drink and food, washing aching bodies coated with blood and dust, cutting off soleless boots and washing the feet that had worn them out. Talking, encouraging, feeding them, carrying out the dead and laying them in stark rows at the back of the platform. All in racing time—not an instant—not a second to lose.

I saw Nancy and Aunt Margaret in their red-stained dresses flying here and there, and suddenly I found myself transferred from Latty to the *majeur*, and carrying his boxes and bottles, following him through the dark waggons.

It was the dream—the dreadful, dreadful dream ; I had always known that train would come in. But alas ! it was only the first of a long series. The driver with the bandaged head, having eaten and drunk, climbed into the engine again and slowly, slowly, the train of sorrows crept out into the darkness of the forest again.

The *majeur* bundled up the instruments Latty had sterilised for him, we washed and sterilised the basins, scrubbed out the waiting-room and the canteen, and never said a word to each other. The *majeur* shook hands with me.

"Bravo! Mees," he said. "You have done something for France this night."

"She is my pupil," said Latty proudly, giving me a smacking kiss—then she kissed Nancy and Aunt Margaret, then blowing her aristocratic nose proudly, she went away to pray beside the dead soldiers of France.

Raoul and Captain P—— came down to where Nancy and I were cleaning Latty's instruments—they looked very grave and sad. "The news are bad," said Raoul in his quaint English. "These men say we are retreating fast on Paris."

"They are the Fifth Army," explained Captain P——, "and if that is so we shall have the Boches here in about a week. Also," he said, addressing Aunt Margaret, "there is bad news from Lorraine—the Bavarians have put us back across the frontier. All is bad—that is why there must be a change of generals and of government."

"Madame," he turned suddenly to Aunt Margaret, and looked straight at her. "I was deeply concerned for you to-night. Indeed I

have been—but all at once you laughed. It was well—yet at such a terrible time, I do not understand. I thought I knew you well—though of course I have always been told that at times of great stress, you Irish people always laugh.”

Aunt Margaret became scarlet in the light of the little lantern she was holding for us.

“I am so sorry!” she apologised. “You know the tall Madame S—— who comes in the evenings, she was here when the train came in—standing there by the table. When I looked into the open waggon where I stood beside her I thought I was demented—the *mélange* of dead and wounded was so terrible—I felt myself going to faint. Then suddenly I caught sight of Madame S——’s face. Her eyes were so wide and her mouth fell open—open—and her teeth fell on the platform among the bottles. It was rather horrible too—she stooped, picked them up and fled—and I laughed—it just saved me, that laugh. I have been quite steady since.”

Raoul was almost hysterical—and Captain P—— smiled gravely. How thin divisions

there are between death and life. How little between tragedy and laughter. I had a funny sensation as Aunt Margaret talked in her quiet voice, that I had read all that had happened that night in Shakespeare's Plays—but of course I had not.

I fell to thinking of those French soldiers. How splendid they were. How splendid the whole nation was. How happy we might be if Britain were like them. The women of France with their white courage, their calm fortitude, the men with that strange look of purity in their eyes, as if they regarded some wondrous vision. I thought of the wounded—how they helped each other in their awful plight. They had talked to me as Latty did their *pansements* and told me such stories of heroism and endurance.

One man who had lost his right arm had carried his comrade, who had lost a leg from the knee, for twenty kilometres. Another had bandaged his captain under fire, and carried him to the ambulance with a great wound in his shoulder. There was no end to the tales of what they did for each other and their gratitude made one want to weep.

Latty and I would wash them and bind up their wounds, and she would call them her children and give them a big smacking kiss that would put life into the worst of them.

“ *Voilà*, my child ! ” she would say. “ Here is a cigarette, and drink this now—and feel happy. You have struck for France. If we all strike as well—we shall be proud of ourselves as we are of you. Brave boys ! ”

At half-past two, the signal came there would be no more trains through till five—and the news was confirmed that the Allies were in retreat and falling back on Paris.

We had little enough to say to each other when we had walked through the forest home and went straight to bed too weary to eat the birthday feast, still on the table. Pierre, who had adopted us apparently, was sitting in the kitchen fast asleep on two chairs. On the table was an exquisitely arranged bouquet of red and white roses in a long glass—and beside them a sheet of paper covered with verses. We read the verses in bed. Pierre was certainly a poet—and his flowers and his verses were the happy spot

in that fateful birthday, and if all he wished me in his shaky old hand comes true, I shall live happily and die blessed. In the morning we discovered the concierge had sent me flowers also, and Captain P——, and the concierge's husband had baked me a really beautiful cake.

I wished we could get an English paper, but Captain P—— says it is impossible. They are not to be had. There are no letters and no papers—and we cannot get any money. What will happen to us if the Germans come?

Nancy and I got up about five, and walked into the town to get a French paper. The paper seller stands in the middle of the street, and if you are not early, the crowd take all the papers—though if they see we cannot get one, some one always lifts his hat, and with a bow, offers us one. “Another can be procured—it is a pleasure to give it to *Les Anglaises*.”

They are all old men who seek the papers in the mornings, or women and little boys. There is one man who passes the Pavilion every morning before us. He is a tall old man, with a soldierly walk, and a pale, high-featured face. I used to

see him before the war with two sons—fine, handsome young men, who walked on either side of him. I always watched them—they were so fond of each other, and so proud. The old father was so spick and span, so immaculately well dressed. Now he is not so neat, and I notice he begins to talk to himself as he walks along. The papers are only one sheet now, and they print only the war news, nothing else. This man seems to read the whole page in one glance, then he turns and strides home. I don't think he has a wife. His sons must have been all in all to him.

While we were in the town the man with the drum came round. It has such a terrible sound, that drum, as he rolls out its summons to the people. The crowd came silently, as it had done from the beginning, listened in silence, and melted away soundlessly.

The government is arranging to cook the food of the poor at the public bakehouse for an infinitesimal cost, and we are admonished not to use the gas for cooking, and very little coal.

We are under martial law, all lights must be

out at nine, and no one is allowed in the streets after eight, unless on Red Cross or military business. The Gendarmerie are all gone and there is a civil guard. Robert is in the Civil Guard. He is furious at being rejected, because he has muscular rheumatism in his right wrist. He has applied for the Motor Transport. Mrs. C——'s maid, Marie, arrived with her child and a great bundle of food, and a most imperative note from Mrs. C——. We have explained to Marie she must be in the house at night by eight according to the orders of the Commandant, but she says it is better to have the key, and come or go as she pleases—which the concierge says is not a possible arrangement, because of the silver. We cannot bank the silver because the bank is closed, and we cannot take it elsewhere, nor can we go elsewhere, because we have been registered at the Pavilion and there we must stay, till we can get a permit to move.

The English are fighting splendidly, but are outnumbered hopelessly. The French, on both frontiers, are also outnumbered and retreating. The people stand about and whisper to each

other, and you can hear "*Soixante-dix—Soixante-dix*" everywhere. It seems in the air—the people look crushed—there is a dark old Frenchwoman at the Post, who talks of nothing else. We have named her "The Prussian," and every night she tells the same terrible story in the same awful voice.

"In *soixante-dix*, remark well, I was a girl of sixteen and my brother Leon was fourteen exactly, and the Prussians came and were billeted in our house—twelve of them with an officer, and my brother Leon they made a slave, absolutely, and they ate and drank all belonging to us, and what they fancied they took. Well! The officer had a silver ring not worth three francs, and he lost it, and accused my brother Leon of stealing it. Poor child! What would he do with a silver ring, when all his time was taken up cleaning Prussian boots and brushing their clothes, and cleaning up the filthy messes they made in their rooms. So Leon says he never saw the ring—which is true—and the officer says unless it is found he will be punished. It is not found. And they punish the innocent child.

How, my friends, think you? They crucify him to the garden wall with bayonets—and he dies—my little brother Leon—fourteen years old.”

“For the sake of the good God, let us pray,” said Latty.

“And if they come again,” boomed “The Prussian,” pointing to Nancy and I, “and find there two little English ones, I will not say what will happen to them—but crucifixion is not the worst that can happen.”

“It will not happen to them,” said Aunt Margaret steadily, “rest assured.”

A look seemed to flash between Latty and the Commandant, and I think both Nancy and I understood, and were thankful we would never—if the worst happened—fall into the hands of the Prussians alive.

The British Forces are fighting hard somewhere—not far off, and the wounded pour down from Lorraine.

A man was taken out to die, but the *majeur* says he will live and has sent him to hospital. This man told us that Joan of Arc is with the

French Army in Lorraine, and has been seen also at Nancy. Latty believes it firmly, but Madame P—— and Raoul still scoff.

In the market place is a great basket for the wounded and all the market people put in the best of their wares. When the wounded go through the streets, the people stand aside and doff their head coverings.

V

LATTY's favourite niece came in one morning, just as we were starting for the Post. "I am come to make my good-byes," she said. "My grandmother is alone at Criel, and the Germans are coming up against Crêpy-en-Valois."

"But what will you do if you are caught there?"

The dull grey days had given place to blazing tropical sunshine, and the light poured over Latty's niece and in her slim exceeding fairness she looked like an angel.

"Oh," she said lightly, "there is an ambulance at Criel, and I am appointed there. I am *majeur*, you know."

That meant that Latty's niece, who was only twenty-one, like myself, had passed the highest examinations in surgical nursing and was to take charge of a Post like her aunt's in the forest. I had altogether lost sight of the old kind of

Frenchwoman I used to know—the old tangoing, gossiping, scandal-loving, narrow-minded Frenchwoman was dead, and in her place was Latty's niece, who might, at the moment, have served as a type of her countrywomen, grave, silent, steady and self-sacrificing. We said good-bye to her in the brilliant sunshine under the tall trees—we have never heard of her since.

On the road where she went, slowly ambled along great herds of cattle, young and old, and between the herds carts laden with poultry, with hay, straw, vegetables, grass and clover—every kind of forage. Soldiers were driving the great mobs of slow-moving cattle, soldiers driving the carts, and every now and again small companies of soldiers, dusty and worn, who took the side aisles and disappeared into the forest. We spent the day at the Post, and when we returned the great mob of cattle was still moving Parisward; lowing softly and mournfully it still moved on through the night and in the morning it was still upon the road.

Aunt Margaret regarded the hordes with a pinched look on her small face. "They are

driving all the stock off the land to Paris," she said quietly, "and that means the Germans are coming up in this direction. Crêpy-en-Valois, Criel, Compiègne. I will go into Pontoise to-day, and see what is happening."

But we never got to Pontoise that day, the wounded poured through the Post the whole day, and they were very miserable. One Highlander implored me to run away. All the time I was assisting with his *pansement*, he kept urging us to fly. "Get awa', lassie," he said heavily. "They're no men—they're devils. All Hell is open now."

His dying eyes, wide and clear blue, seemed to still look at an awful something beyond us. "Oh, women, dear," he said weakly—but he could say no more. His hand lifted feebly and pointed to the forest. I think with his latest breath he urged us to escape—little knowing that there was no escape possible. We might indeed go to Paris—to the *appartement*, but the Germans were coming up against Paris, and we would be shut in there—perhaps like Pierre's sister to starve eventually. The French wounded

murmured heavily of *soixante-dix*—it was to be defeat again—and humiliation. “You cannot defeat the Boches, they are like the sands of the sea, you mow down a thousand and a thousand takes its place.”

They told us of the new explosive which cut the Germans down in swathes—wherever it flew Death went with it. It made no ugly wounds, tearing flesh and blood apart. It did not mangle men out of all semblance to humanity—it just dealt out death. But there was something wrong with it. They could not tell what. The gunners did not like it. They were all miserable that bright beautiful day—the sunshine mocked the bleeding, suffering, broken men from the battlefields—and we also, even more, for our safety depended on theirs.

The Tauben, too, were a source of great worry to us. Aunt Margaret was fascinated by them, as soon as the Taube appeared, swooping low over the clearing, she would run out, and putting her hands over her eyes to shade them, she would stand staring into the sky. They are very evil-looking, these German aeroplanes, not like doves,

but more like great hawks, or vultures, black against the sky, and somehow conveying a sense of domineering cruelty—very different to the gay airiness of the French aeroplanes that are a glistening yellow, with the tri-colour adorning the wings, or the British, a bright silver, with the Union Jack showing on the planes. I used to fear the German aviator would drop a bomb on little Aunt Margaret, she was such a conspicuous figure in her white nurse's dress, but nothing could stop her, once she heard the hum of the propeller she was off.

Latty took us away from the Post with her in the car, to buy medical stores, and when we reached Our Lady in the Cradle, we found the narrow Route de Paris thronged with carts and crowded with old women and men, and little children.

Nearly all the children were weeping, and the old women weeping trying to comfort them—the younger women, the babies' mothers, were walking wearily by the carts and driving them.

Latty pulled up to ask questions. Pontoise had been evacuated. These women and children

were to rest in the Convent on the hill for the night, and in the morning go on to Paris.

Latty's fine face was as white as marble, when she got back into the car.

"It is you I think of, *ma chérie*," she said, "you and *la belle Nancy*—and my Jean. We know what the Boches do to little boys. Look at me, I will send you and Nancy and Jean in this car to Blois, with Robert——"

"And leave Aunt Margaret! Oh, no—not much!"

Latty shook her fist at me furiously.

"Detestable English slang!" she exploded. "What do you mean—'not much'?"

"*Pas du tout—du tout—du tout!*" explained Nancy. "Besides, what's the good of running away from Germans on one side of Paris to run into them on the other?"

"Well, perhaps——" conceded Latty. "Let's buy the medicines."

Nancy and I walked all over Our Lady in the Cradle in search of an English paper, but not one was to be had.

"It may be in Paris you could get one," the

little old lady in the bookstall told us. "But nothing comes here now—only the Paris papers."

While Latty was arguing about her sous, a queer-looking flat-chested girl came up to the bookstall and stood staring at us. She had a long, olive-complexioned face, with large hazel eyes and a full, rather loose-lipped mouth. She was not very tall and extraordinarily slender. She had a large hat on, covering a fashionably-dressed head, her serge skirt was slit to the knee, and she wore a very expensive blouse and a miniature of a soldier in the uniform of a *Chasseur d'Afrique*.

She advanced to Latty and begged her permission to join the Post. "I cannot do any surgical work," she said, "but I can wait on the English lady who cooks. I can clean saucepans and scrub, and I have a bicycle and can run errands."

She went on to explain that the relations she lodged with had gone to Brittany and left her. Her husband was fighting, but had written to say his regiment would pass through the station in the forest, and she waited to see him.

Her French was extraordinarily good, but every now and again, came a queer little catch in it that suggested other than French origin.

“ You are not French ? ” I suggested.

With a smile that reached from ear to ear, she explained she was from Brazil. All her people were there, and they were quite well-known people, and of good position.

“ No doubt ! no doubt ! ” agreed Latty. “ Well, you can come for a day or two—till we see what you can do.”

The girl gave a laughing salute and disappeared, and we resumed our way back to the Post. The cattle were still being driven down the street, and on the footpaths were groups of people hurrying along with such baggage as they could carry. In one street we saw a rich man of our acquaintance hurrying along, his daughter and he carrying between them a huge bundle done up in a sheet and slung on a stick. People had apparently to carry what they could. There was no portage, no cabs or carts—all the horses were taken.

“ Look at that ! ” said Latty in a disgusted

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tone. "Look at him. It is his gold plate and his miniatures, no doubt, in that sheet. *Sapristi!* Think of running away like that!"

"What will you do with your valuables?" I asked her.

She twirled the automobile round the corner and winked at me.

"Don't you think I'll let them fall into the Boches' hands," she said. "I've got 'em hidden away."

"You can't hide anything from the Boches," said Nancy.

Latty nodded energetically. "I'll tell you afterwards," she said. "But I've hidden everything except this——" she patted the decoration that had been bestowed on her last year, "and if the Boches get too near I'll swallow it—so that it will be buried with me."

As we went on towards Latty's house, the streets seemed more deserted—there was not a soul in the market place, and the dogs and cats seemed to be wandering about looking for their people.

We met Monsieur P—— walking very slowly

with bent head, his shoulders bent under a black knapsack. He smiled at us gravely. Latty pulled up.

“ *Bon jour*, my friend,” she cried. “ Have you found Jean ? ”

Monsieur P—— shook his head. “ Not yet,” he said wanly, “ but I will try again. The fighting has been bad over there.” He waved a hand towards the hills rising in the distance. “ They have sent another army to meet the retreat on Paris. He may be with them—I will rest to-morrow and start again.”

He lifted his hat again and went on—of all the dreadful things I saw and heard at this time none affected me so much as the thought of Monsieur P—— searching over the battlefields for his eldest born, to give him the little packet of comforts he carried in his knapsack. Sometimes the brothers sought like that too—risking their lives to bring a mouthful of comfort to the beloved fighting man of the family.

Jean and Robert started in the automobile for Blois—we all kissed Jean, greatly to his disgust, and shook hands with Robert, never

expecting to see either of them again. But we did.

The Post was considerably diminished, so Latty was rather glad of the Brazilian girl that night, and also of François, the nephew of the town nurse, who was a "Boy Scoot" as they call it in France. The guard was augmented too, and the Commandant remained at the Post.

Early in the night a train came in with a load of badly wounded. We were fighting a rear-guard action, and the wounds were terrible, but though these men were worse physically than those of the night before, their spirit was totally changed—and they all talked of Joan of Arc—Joan of Arc had appeared to the troops and saved them from disaster—they begged for medals, or Holy pictures and repudiated any idea of weakness or dying. Some of them, though bled white, declared themselves fit to go back to the front immediately their wounds were dressed.

One man would not let me touch him till he had related how he saw St. Michael the Archangel.

I look back now on that terrible week and

wonder we are sane women. Everybody who could go left the towns around the forest, just put their most precious things in a sack or a sheet, or anything that could hold them, and fled. One could walk down the streets and not meet a soul. It realised for me what it must have been like in the plague of England. Deserted houses, empty streets—just a shop open here and there, but with the shutters up, and the bar propped ready behind the door.

Then Aunt Margaret reminded us that there were certain things in the *appartement* we ought to have with us—papers and some old family treasures. Captain P—— offered us the loan of an automobile, and we had leave from Latty for a day, and went up to Paris. At the top of the hill was a huge barricade where the car was halted and the *maréchal* who was driving us gave the password and countersign. I remembered this hill and the long sweep of road beside the Seine that day war was declared, thronged with smart cars going or coming—and the trams rushing to and fro without a pause. It seemed like a dream—short as the time was, already

grass was growing on the tram-line—before us the road lay in the brilliant sunshine almost deserted—now and then a military car would fly past us, or a waggon full of soldiers taking ammunition.

All the gay little riverside cafés were shuttered up, and the people gone. All along the road were vehicles that had been left there in the mobilisation. A laundry cart full of soiled linen, a big market cart, a drayload of furniture, the government had taken the horses, and there they must stay till other horses were available.

The lonely road led us through Place de la Defense where old Pierre lay that night he rescued his sister from the Prussians—and Neuilly—where there was an immense barricade, and the soldiers were constructing all kinds of defences.

Here we were held up again, and an officer came out and spoke to us. He spoke really wonderful English, and he told us he had been educated at Harrow. He was greatly delighted that we were with the French Red Cross. Finally we were in Paris.

It was a Paris unrecognisable—from the Porte Maillot to the Arc de Triomphe we saw only two Red Cross wagons. The streets were almost empty, the rare pedestrian was hurrying as if he feared to be seen. The road was up in the Avenue Wagram, and all the workmen had left their tools beside the excavation anyhow, as if they had dropped them and run.

The blinds were pulled down in the great houses, and blank windows stared into the empty street—at the junction of the Avenue Wagram and the Boulevard Malherbe stood a wooden case, turned on end, and on it, neatly arranged, was a little pile of groceries, with the bill fluttering under a package, on the top.

The Government had left Paris, taking with it nearly everybody who could go. The banks were closed—or gone, all but the American Bank and the London County and Westminster, which had stayed on because so many English people had placed all their valuables in the bank, and the manager would not leave them. The *New York Herald* also remained.

It was like driving through a deserted city—

no people, no shops—only here and there a vehicle, and this was Paris !

At the *appartement*, the concierge first stared at us as if we had come back from the dead—then welcomed us tearfully ; many people complain of the evil concierge—and a very great evil she is. But ours was a dear—a kind, handsome, black-eyed woman from the Midi—whose husband was a lawyer—one of the very kindest people we ever met.

She helped us to pack up what we wished to take, and went about covering up the furniture and putting away things in drawers as if she were an old confidential servant. Then she made us coffee and embraced us tenderly on parting—being, as she told us afterwards, certain we should never meet again.

“ The Germans,” she informed us, “ are at Criel.”

Mariette packed us all into the car and we turned outwards again, and while we waited at the gate I was conscious of a strange, dull feeling in my ears—not a sound, just a feeling, as if

something heavy and very soft were pressing against the drums of my ears.

The officer at the gate inclined his head over his left shoulder. "They are coming up very quickly," he remarked. "Mesdames, you will have your work laid out for you to-night."

We skimmed like a bird along the deserted road, with an angry scarlet sun striking before us, and great purple clouds barring the sky—while the air throbbed with that dull menace from afar.

The town was as nearly empty now as it could be, and the Guard had sealed up many of the doors. The Mayor had given permission for the poor to enter the gardens of the deserted houses and take the fruit and vegetables, and old Pierre had accumulated a store of apples and potatoes.

In those terrible days Pierre was a constant aid to us. He would do anything, swept and dusted, and cared for the garden. He was always turning up with a little bouquet of flowers for me, or a little paper cone of strawberries for Aunt Margaret. How he provided strawberries in

August I cannot tell—but he did—and Aunt Margaret slaked many a thirsty throat out of his little white paper cone.

“Little but good,” Pierre described himself. And we all agreed with him. His only weakness was wine. “But what will you?” he would demand. “A man whose wife is *always* praying must occupy himself somehow.”

“I will tell you a something, Mademoiselle,” he said as he helped us in with our baskets. “There is bad news—and the people uneasy—the Government have told us nothing—but we know the English are falling back on Paris with us—and the Germans are pressing hard.”

François came up on his bicycle and said Latty desired us to come quickly to the Post—there were many English.

He leant on his bicycle and looked at us earnestly.

“Mees,” he said. “Have you observed the Brazilienne at the Post?”

I said I had not—much.

“Ah, well,” he sighed. “I have—to-morrow I will tell you something.”

VI

“MESDAMES,” said François, as we reached the station, “the train is not yet arrived. I would like to show you a very curious thing, just one instant.”

He propped his bicycle against the wall, and beckoned us across the road where a sentry-box guarded the forest avenues.

“There! What do you think of that curious thing?”

The curious thing was an outline drawing in black crayon of a cow, with her head up, looking at the sky. It was a biggish drawing, crude and awkward—evidently the artist had never studied anatomy. It might have been the work of a child, but there was something in it which did not suggest childhood.

“I ask you,” resumed François, “because yesterday I bicycled to Pontoise with Madame la Brésilienne, and while I sought information, she

made a drawing similar to that, but much larger. I caught her at it—there is no harm in drawing cows, mesdames—yet—I am full of unease. For instance, does one keep sheep in Brazil ? ”

“ I don’t think so.”

“ Nor do I—thanks, mesdames. I will talk to the Commandant—or the captain.”

We entered the Post and found the Brazilian lady washing up cups with a great clatter. She had beside her a large piece of the ham and garlic sausage so beloved of the soldiers, and a piece of fresh loaf. At intervals she would take a huge bite of sausage and a mouthful of bread.

Latty came sailing along to meet us, and glanced at her.

“ Stop, madame,” she cried. “ Where did you get that sausage ? ”

The Brazilian lady pointed a thumb over her shoulder at the canteen. Her mouth was too full to answer.

“ H—y—m,” snorted Latty. “ I thought so. Now mark me well, young lady, the food in this canteen is for the soldiers, and not for the

workers at the Post. *Buy* your food in the town."

I thought the Brazilian was about to throw the cup she was drying at Latty's head, but suddenly she averted her blazing eyes and, mumbling something, went on with her work. As soon as Latty's back was turned, she rushed down the platform, and I saw her ride across the place on her bicycle, followed quickly by François, and almost immediately afterwards by the Commandant's car full of soldiers.

I was not surprised when François told me the Brazilian was a German boy—one of their cleverest spies. A good deal of information was found on him, and the reason why he drew cows.

Captain P—— went across to the sentry-box with a bucket of whitewash and obliterated the drawing; according to a code of signals it showed the size of the garrison at C——, and that there were aeroplanes scouting.

While we were sitting making bandages, and rolling cigarettes, old Pierre came in, dressed in ragged old regimentals. He carried a beautifully arranged bouquet for Nancy and me, and a

little basket of peaches for Aunt Margaret. He had come to say *au revoir*, he was going to look for his second son—news had reached him that André was wounded.

“*Au revoir*,” he said, smiling cheerfully. “The good God will no doubt permit that I kill a Boche or so—a man whose wife prays all day is entitled to some compensation.”

He turned at the gate. “The news is bad,” he said. “But all is not lost while we have the English—the English *never* give up.”

He went just as the train came in—and we began our work—there were very few of us now, and the work was heavy. It was the twenty-fourth of August, and the wounded came from the retreating army; they flowed out over the platform and waiting-room into the green spaces under the trees, and with them began the Week of Terror and Faith. The wounded were in a curious state of exaltation—they talked not of defeat, but victory, and spoke of Joan of Arc and St. Michael riding white horses and turning back the foe. Some of the men spoke also of the Germans falling dead in their ranks where Joan

of Arc and her Companion, Michael the Archangel, had intervened between the contending hosts. The Allies were fighting a rearguard action all the way. It had begun on Sunday, they had been falling back from Mons, fighting, fighting all the way.

The men's wounds were horrible—they were in a state of absolute physical exhaustion, yet not one of them was depressed or despondent. There was a boy of about twenty-two, two of whose fingers on the right hand were hanging by a thread—the forefinger was pulp, yet he refused to have it amputated.

“I don't mind the others,” he said, looking at us with fever-bright eyes, “but if you take off that one, Doctor, I cannot go back to the firing-line.”

“You may die of blood-poisoning.”

“Better that than be useless to France,” declared the boy. “I would be in the march to Berlin.”

“Looks like it——” groaned the doctor, “with the Boches in Paris.”

“They will never be in Paris,” declared the

boy. "I have seen St. Michael fighting by my side. We shall have the victory. The Boches are doomed."

The *majeur* patted him affectionately on the back, and ordered me to fetch the brandy. He gave the boy, now almost swooning from loss of blood, a huge nip—and we carried him back to the train. He had a great wound in his leg, a wound in his shoulder, and two of the fingers off his right hand, but he was going back to the firing line—and I know he did.

A man whose right leg had been blown away showed me a piece of shell. It was smeared inside with a curious greenish-bluish substance.

"What do you think that is, my sister?" he asked.

It smelt curiously—but I could not place it. The captain did, however. "It is phosphorus," he said. "Where did you get this, *mon enfant*?"

"It is part of the shell that took my leg," responded the soldier.

The captain's face darkened, and the teeth met on his lower lip.

“ The hogs ! ” he groaned, “ the dirty hogs—murderers—— ”

He walked away, and the soldier, returning the piece of shell to his pocket, let me pad the hard wood with cushions under him, and light his cigarette. They were also washed, bandaged and fed—comforted as far as we could comfort them—given a cigarette, and sent on.

The English boys were more reticent than the French ; they did not confide in us so easily, nor were they so easily comforted.

Their faces were hard and set, and they held themselves with a pride that brought tears to my eyes. Mostly their boots were falling off their feet—some had none at all ; their wounds were nearly all shrapnel, or bullets, in the head or shoulders. They all had the same strange, “ exalted ” look—and also they, after their wounds were dressed, spoke of St. George on a white horse.

A boy whose right arm had been amputated, told me the Field Hospital where he had been shelled by the Germans, and most of the men in it killed. “ They’re not men, sister,” he flamed,

“they’re devils—that’s why St. George is fighting for us.”

There was a big Highland boy propped in a corner, bleeding from a shoulder wound. Latty insisted on his being taken out and sent to the hospital in the town. He, however, wanted to go on. “My poor boy!” wept Latty, “you will die.”

The Highlander looked up at her with deep mystical eyes, flaming with fever.

“Na! Na!” he said. “I’m no goin’ west yit—I’ve a bit German killin’ tae do first. In Belgium yonder I saw twelve wee lassies—just wee bit slips of lassies—mebbe the eldest would be nine or ten—an’ for ivery one of them I’ll hae twa German fathers—jist that—I’ll no die—no fear.”

All the soldiers implored us to run away—they all told us that the Germans were brute beasts and devils. At length Nancy and I replied in the same words. We would work so long as we were necessary, but we would never fall into the Germans’ hands alive, they might be sure of that.

The brave, kind boys! In all their agonies they thought of the safety of the two English girls, who could do so little for them. But that little, how gladly we did it!

In one waggon I found Aunt Margaret washing the blistered feet of an English boy who had marched the soles off his boots. She had given him a basin of hot milk, but he could not hold it, and I fed him with it in spoonfuls, as if he were a baby. Not easy, because all the time he was saying to himself in a dull quiet voice, "I was at Mons—I was at Mons—I was at Mons."

"Weren't you all at Mons?" asked Aunt Margaret, as she sponged and dried the weary feet.

"Yes, Ma—we were so," replied a big gunner. "His head's a bit dazed, that's all. We've been retiring since Sunday, you see, no time for food or drink, or a sleep—that's done it. He's only a kid."

In the next truck we found a Tommy trying to feed a little boy-baby of two or so, with pieces bitten out of a peach Nancy had given him. Nancy had gone for Latty about the baby, the boy had picked it up in the road and carried

it in the retreat till he was wounded—and so tightly did the child cling to its preserver that it was flung with him into the train.

“He’s such a nice little chap, sister,” said the Tommy, “an’ a rare good plucked one—not a cry out of him since I picked him up.”

At what a cost to himself this brave boy had carried the baby! His right arm was just pulp, and his left wounded above the elbow.

He did not want to be parted from the baby, but Latty pointed out the advantages of leaving it with her—and he agreed—whereon Latty kissed him soundly, and called him a “brave gosse,” greatly to his embarrassment.

“How did you manage to pick up the child under the German guns?” I asked. He shifted a little uncomfortably, then looked bravely into my eyes.

“It’s a bit of a queer thing I’m going to say—but it’s *true*,” he said. “It was a kind of golden cloud between us and the Germans, and a man in it on a big horse—and then I saw the child in the dust on the roadside, and I picked it up.”

"Yes, sister," he added. "Lots of other chaps saw it too."

There was a murmur of confirmation. "The minute I saw it," he continued, "I knew we were going to win. It fair bucked me up—yes, sister, thank you. I'm as comfortable as I could be."

So another train steamed out, carrying its load of shattered humanity to haven—and we made ready for the next.

One after the other the trains came in with their terrible loads. We sifted the dead from the dying, and did what we could, and made ready for the next. Just before sunset a Taube came over us, circling round and round above the treetops—and we waited apprehensively a bomb. Suddenly out of the blue came a French aeroplane, and the German turned to fly. But it was cut off. For nearly half an hour they circled and plunged, and rose in the air, each trying to get above the other. A train came in, and we worked with feverish haste to get it off before the German could fulfil his mission.

Then in an instant it was over, and the black

bird of Death came plunging sideways down into the forest—with the Frenchman planing down easily after him. Both pilot and observer were dead, and the captured Taube was taken to the aerodrome.

We could not return home—there was no time, so we spent the night at the Post, where we slumbered between whiles on chairs and benches. My dress had a wet border of scarlet round it, and so had Nancy's. We were all in the same plight—stained and weary, and sick with horror. Aunt Margaret got a tub and washed everything she could lay hands on, and we put them out to dry on the shrubs and benches. We went out on the line and collected the dirty dressings and burnt them. The Commandant shrouded his cigar in the waiting-room, and we sat together listening to the dull sound ever-nearing that had begun like a throbbing in the ears the day we were in Paris. It was now like the rolling of distant thunder, and there was a smokiness in the air and an acrid smell.

All night there was a fluttering and piping in the forest, and sometimes a flight of confused

and skirling birds would sweep past and settle in the trees. It was very strange to *feel* the birds flying in the moonlight, they roosted everywhere, on the edge of the platform, and on the roof, and on every twig and branch of the undergrowth along the line—as if the little woodland folk were seeking to shelter beside the Croix Rouge also.

The soldiers had collected the cattle strayed into the forest from the great mobs driven up to Paris, and put them in an enclosure opposite the Post. They moaned and cried all through the dark, and the horses stamped and jingled their harness. The soldiers made coffee at their fire and brought it over to us, and we all drank together, listening to the distant growling in the murky air.

I wondered what we would do when the first Uhlans came out of the forest and rushed at the Post. What Latty and Aunt Margaret and Madame L—— would do—and Madame P—— and Raoul, the brave and tender, with his beautiful boyish face and gay smile. How good he had been that day—how thoughtful and kind as a woman !

Well, anyhow, one thing we had silently agreed on—none of us women would fall into the German hands alive : we remembered the Belgian girls.

At dawn, with Raoul and Nancy, we walked to the little station in the town for a paper. There was no one in the street, but as we passed the church the old Abbé came down the steps, with two peasant women, both weeping bitterly.

“No ! no !” protested the Abbé cheerfully, “there is no need to weep like this. My children, you can come to me and I will protect you.”

“Alas ! alas !” wept the elder woman, “that would be to add your death to our own, Father. They always kill priests, old women and children.”

“Ah, perhaps !” said the Abbé. “We are the most ready to face God. The children are sinless, and we have had time to repent. Therefore have courage, my children. Come !”

He gave them a cheerful benediction and hurried over to us, greatly rejoiced, apparently, that we too had not fled.

“ I am alone in my street,” he said cheerfully, “ and I have not given up my revolver. I may have at least one Boche to my credit.”

The morning sun was just beginning to light the place, and as it brightened his white hair and his saintly old face, I did homage to a brave man.

VII

THE booming came nearer and nearer with each hour of that dreadful time till the morning of 1st of September dawned smoky red, with the roar of the guns filling the air. We saw the French artillery falling back on Paris—a long procession of dusty, worn-out horses, barely staggering along in the breathless heat, with the men nodding in their seats, and on their beasts—bloody heads and wounded arms and legs aplenty—and all day long the trains poured in choc-a-bloc with broken men. The tales they told of the Germans were beyond belief. One man rescued by his comrades had the soles of his feet burnt off. He had been tortured for information—which they did not get. Other things we heard were too horrible to repeat. They were such things as only fiends from the Bottomless Pit could have imagined or carried out.

The old Abbé came down to the Post with a little basket of peaches, and we discussed the story of the Archangel and Joan of Arc. With the boom of the German guns in our ears and the sight of the devilish work they had executed on our brave boys, I was conscious of a bitter resentment against St. Michael and his companion. Why, if they had power to lead the Allies had they not led them to victory? Why—if God was God, had He not driven the Huns back to their own place? Why had He not blasted them out of existence in one great flame of fire?

The old Abbé looked at me sorrowfully. "It is for the purification of the whole world," he said. "The Germans are the Power of Evil. I have seen it since *soixante-dix*. They represent all that makes for wickedness—and they have poisoned the body of the world—and you English, *chère mademoiselle*, are to blame most of all, for you have given them great places—and much honour—yes, they have poisoned the body of the world—but most of all England, and she will suffer most in expiation. As for France——"

“Is it that God has forsaken us?” asked Captain P——.

“M. le Capitaine,” said the Abbé, “I never saw you at Communion before Sunday—why did you come then?”

The Captain coloured slightly. “*They*,” he waved his hand to the forest, “are coming up—I made my peace with Him.”

“Exactly,” said the Abbé. “So with all. When France calls upon God He will hear her. No—the Germans will not conquer.” He gave us his blessing and departed, and a rushing of wild birds fled after him on the hot wind.

“*They* come nearer!” remarked the Captain.

He went down the platform, and presently all the soldiers crossed the line and disappeared in the forest. Early in the afternoon the crackling of rifle-fire—shouts and cries and rushings of horses’ feet in the forest aisles reached us at our work. The Commandant seemed rigid at the entrance to the station, his eyes fixed on the forest. We worked with feverish haste, never speaking. The afternoon wore on, and night came. In one of the carriages

we found a Prussian officer in a British uniform. He insolently demanded champagne and fresh bread. We pulled him out and the Commandant disarmed him and tied him up. A man asked Nancy to lift him up to drink, and clasping his hands round her arm, died holding her—and in that dead grasp she was held for nearly fifteen minutes. We had gangrene, too, and tried to isolate them—by setting aside one of our number to guard them.

“Where are *They* now?” I asked Raoul.

“Coming up to Meaux,” he whispered. “The news are bad.”

Aunt Margaret and Latty were never off their feet that long night. “Come back, Ma,” the English soldiers would call.

“Ma” took messages, washed grimy faces, and feet that had marched for seventy hours. “Seventy hours, Ma,” said one boy stolidly. “Ain’t it a miracle I’ve got a foot at all?”

Oh, the tales of simple heroism we heard in that dreadful night. Whether we lived to remember them, or died with our wounded—we

were filled with the glory of their deeds and the splendour of their devotion—French and English alike. The stars in the dark sky were not more glorious than their souls.

And in the night a train came suddenly through, carrying the telegraphic apparatus, and wireless, from the station beyond, and warning us to be ready to evacuate at any moment. The thunder of the guns went on till just before dawn, when it suddenly ceased—but the trains came steadily in, it was as if all the Allies had been broken in this awful fray.

Morning came, and *They* had not arrived. Captain P—— came out of the forest—grimy and grim. A patrol of Uhlans had got through at Compeine—but “it was disposed of.” So there had been fighting in the forest!

Aunt Margaret came down to speak to us. Her hair was a kind of dusty white, and her face so changed I scarcely recognised her. As I stood, basin in hand, staring at her, François came up on his bicycle, with Raoul racing beside him.

“The news are good!” he cried joyously.

“ We have them surrounded. Mesdames, we have turned ! ”

The Allies had turned at Vitry-le-François and were attacking.

In the afternoon the Abbé came to tell us Monsieur P—— had found Jean—unwounded, and given him a change of clothing and some food. We rejoiced with Raoul and Madame P——, and turned to our work again. Our hands were full.

“ Now,” said Latty, “ you will see the others returning, and we shall be inundated. But my little English, I shall not forget how *we* faced the Boches together.” She kissed us all affectionately, and we set about our various tasks. The heat was tropical, there was a plague of wasps and flies—and the stench of the station was terrible. If I had owned the world, I would have offered it in exchange for half an hour’s sleep—but there was no time for sleep.

The wounded came through from Vitry-le-François, and we heard again strange tales from the wounded. The Allies had fallen back for seventy-eight hours—marching, marching,

fighting a rearguard action all the way. No food, no drink, harried by German shell, and German horse—marching night and day, day and night—the men falling dead asleep in the ranks, to be kicked to their feet by the officers—of the officers falling off their feet drunk with sleep, and being pushed and kicked to their feet again by the men—of horses that fell dead in the traces and being replaced by men, who could barely put one blistered foot before the other—yet dragged on their guns; of motor transport that drove itself, with the drivers hanging dead asleep over the wheels, or sitting with wide-open eyes and dead hands, steering food and munitions to safety, till at last the Germans fell in their tracks and both armies slept.

Then came the trumpet call, and the Allies sprang to their feet new men—one man said he felt as if he had just come out of the sea after a swim—"fit for anything!" Then as the immense wall of the German army came up, a kind of luminous mist settled down between it and the Allied forces—and out of the mist came two

mounted figures—Joan of Arc and St. Michael, on white horses.

The men who related these stories varied them in this wise—that the British saw St. George and the French St. Joan and St. Michael. There did not seem to be any *religious* sentiment in the stories, but those who told them had left the fight in the certainty that victory was with the Allies.

One man, a Breton, practically echoed what the Abbé had said one night before. “It must be a pretty hard case for us, when God has to send His best fighting man to our aid. You see, Mademoiselle Mees, it is an ancient feud between Satan and St. Michael. He got him out of heaven—now he will get him off the earth, but it will take time.”

One soldier told me he had seen Joan of Arc brandishing a sword, and crying to them to “Advance!”

This man was from Domrémy, and was familiar with the tradition of the shepherd girl. He had fought with the English all the way from Mons—and little Joan of Arc had defeated the

H

English—*par exemple!* Now she was leading them—there was a combination for you! No wonder the Boches fled.

We had three tall men of the Irish Guard who died that night—and another who survived. These men told the Abbé a tale of St. George riding on a white horse between them and the Germans. A Lancashire Fusilier and a man of the R.F.A. also told me a similar story. All the French asked eagerly for medals of Joan of Arc and St. Michael, and these two men demanded a medal, or a picture, of St. George—because they had seen him—these men all came from in or about Vitry-le-François—where the Allies turned. These men were sure they had seen St. George, because they were familiar with his figure on the English sovereign, and had recognised it.

When this train had gone out we had another discussion. The Commandant wavered between belief and doubt. “Seventy-eight hours afoot,” he summed up. “I wonder they didn’t see the Devil!”

Raoul, however, advanced no opinion, and

the Captain was silent. We also—like many—pondered it in our hearts and said nothing. If God was—why should this thing not be ?

“ Why should He not, seeing the Powers of Hell about to prevail, send His best fighting men ? ” said Madame P——. “ It is like this—the Pope makes saints—but does God accept the Pope’s ultimatum ? that’s the stumbling-block.”

Madame P—— is a Huguenot—and mourns always deeply that this war is caused by a Protestant nation—though the Captain assures her the Germans do not worship her Protestant God, but a good old god of their own—Odin to wit.

With that dreadful night ended our work at the Post. In the morning we were informed that we must present ourselves at the Hospital, and be entered for service. We were mobilised with the French Army, and had our numbers, and were liable to be called upon for service anywhere.

About noon then, we crawled homewards, and on the way met Jean, Latty’s younger son,

running down to the Post. The automobile had been smashed by a shell, and he had walked all the way back from Chantilly. He had seen the Germans, millions of men in grey with faces of the devil. Robert was driving an ammunition waggon, and would not return. He could drive quite well with the left hand. The Germans were in retreat—all was well—but all the pretty little towns and villages were in ruins—and the Boches killed babies—yes, truly—tore them out of their mothers' arms and thrust a bayonet through them.

We went on, while Jean ran to the Post, where Latty sat nodding on her hard bench beside the wounded. We had forgotten what it was like to sleep in a bed. We had slept in odd snatches—but never enough to give one the feeling of rest. We began to think that at any moment we, too, might see visions.

In the kitchen sat Peter—thin as a rake. His shrivelled old hands about a little damp ball of blackness.

“See, Mademoiselle,” he cried, holding it

out to me. "Behold this little '*Blessé*'—I have brought it to you."

A little black Persian kitten—one of its eyes gouged out, one tiny fluffy paw broken, and hanging helplessly.

"I killed him," said Peter, with a satisfied indrawing of his breath. "I killed the dirty pig who did it to the little animal. André, my big son, had a German rifle—good! I killed the Boche—he had tied the little animal to a tree, would you believe it—and he was torturing it. Oh, I assure you, he died thoroughly, that one! Yes, I thought always the good God would compensate me for having a wife who prayed all day. And the little cat will be a beauty, *pansez* its little hand, MdlleMees—the eye I have attended to myself—so—courage now, my *dear* friends! I will make you coffee and all will be well. Thank God the Germans are now in retreat. Oh, I can tell you a thing or two about what *we* have done. *Allons!* sit in the salon and I will bring coffee."

I sat down and bandaged the little black hand—of all the devilish cruelties I had seen none

brought home to me the utter depravity of the German soul as this innocent little victim of their lust of hate.

“Dogs!” I heard a Canadian call them, his eyes like hot steel at the remembrance of what he had seen. But that was too high praise—to rank them with the faithful friend of man. They are nothing but themselves. All the wickedness, the lust, the hate and cruelty and greed—the filthiness unimaginable that exists can be summed up in one word: *German!*

When I saw the German prisoners the next day, and went about like all the others holding my nose—I thought they were distinctly a race that is something apart from Humanity, as we understand the word.

When they stood blinking in the sun with their square heads and putty-coloured faces, colourless eyes and lashes—furtive yet unspeakably sinister in their grey uniforms—they suggested to me a creation of some monstrous spirit of evil. We call them Huns—and do so without understanding that in reality they are a something more than Huns, and less—for the Huns

were at least individuals. But these are merely so much of the mechanism that goes to make the gigantic whole of Germania—and each unit has no more individuality, no more soul, than any other steel cog, or wheel, or spring, or catch in the machine that is moved by the mind of the Kaiser and his crowd.

Is it strange, then, that saints and angels should fight against this dreadful foe—or that the veil which hangs between us and Immortality should be rent and shrivelled by such suffering and agony of the innocent as this world has never seen. Is it strange that the cries of virgins violated, of crucified sons and fathers—of brothers and sons carbonised, of nuns tortured and burnt—of priests tortured and impaled, of little children done to death in such ways that they cannot be spoken of, is it strange that the torment of these has dragged at the feet of the Ruler of the Universe till He sent aid.

I have seen no vision. But in my heart I believe that the Captains of God are leading the Allies to victory, through untold suffering, through loss, and privation and sacrifice this

nation is being brought to re-birth. Already have I seen France rise from her own corruption, a splendour of white youth—filled with Holy Vengeance, silent, alert, implacable. And they say in France this thing :

“ The English are mercy without judgment. But we—*are judgment without mercy.*”

ORIGINALS AND TRANSLATIONS OF MISS CAMPBELL'S CREDENTIALS *

Copy.

Au chevet de nos blessés, votre grace, votre sourire viennent réchauffer leur cœur en leur apportant un rayon de soleil. Je vous admire sympathiques petites alliées et j'envie vos vingt ans.

(Signed) C. D.

*Vice-President de l'Association des
Dames Françaises de 1914-1915.*

Translation.

To the bedside of our wounded come your kindness and your smile to warm their heart, bringing them a ray of sunshine. I admire you, sympathetic little allies, and I envy you your twenty years.

(Signed) C. D.

*Vice-President of the Association des
Dames Françaises at 1914-1915.*

* All these documents bear official stamps.

Copy.

Je soussignée chargée de la Direction du Poste de Secours de l'Association des Dames Françaises (Croix Rouge Française) à la gare du chemin de fer de la Grande Ceinture à . . . certifie que Miss Phil Campbell m'a prêté son concours du 15 Août au 20 Septembre, 1914, pour donner, au passage de nombreux trains sanitaires, les soins urgents que nécessitent l'état de certains blessés.

Elle nous a aussi rendu un réel service en servant d'interprète pour les trains anglais.

Je me plais à faire l'éloge du zèle, du devouement et de l'adresse dont elle n'a cessé de me donner des preuves pendant ces 5 semaines d'une intime collaboration.

(Signed) G. BOURGET.

Infirmière diplômée de l'Association des Dames Françaises et du Secours aux Blessés Militaires.

Translation.

I, the undersigned, head of the Poste de Secours de l'Association des Dames Françaises (French Red Cross) at the Grande Ceinture railway station at ——— certify that Miss Phil Campbell gave me her help from the 15th of August to the 20th of September, 1914, in giving the immediate attention required by certain of the wounded in numerous hospital trains as they went through.

She also rendered us real assistance in acting as interpreter for the English trains.

I have pleasure in commending the zeal, enthusiasm and skill of which she has given me continual proofs during our five weeks' close collaboration.

(Signed) G. BOURGET.

Certificated Nurse of the Association des Dames Françaises and of the Secours aux Blessés Militaires.

Copy.

Le Chef de Bataillon Commissaire Militaire à la gare de — s'associe à l'appréciation formulée ci-dessus par Madame Bourget—Directrice du Poste des Dames Françaises—sur le compte de Miss Phil Campbell.

(Signature)

Commissaire Militaire du gare.

Seal.

Stamped by the Commandant de la Poste on Madame Bourget's certificate for Miss Campbell.

Translation.

The Commanding Officer, Commissaire Militaire at — station, joins in the foregoing expression of appreciation by Madame Bourget, head of the Poste des Dames Françaises, in regard to Miss Phil Campbell.

(Signature)

Commissaire Militaire du gare.

Seal.

Stamped by the Commandant de la Poste on Madame Bourget's certificate for Miss Campbell.

Copy.

(Stamp of the Association des Dames Françaises.)

Je soussignée Gabrielle Maurice Larroque Surveillante Majore de la salle C à l'hôpital Auxiliaire — de l'Association des Dames Françaises certifie que Miss Campbell a fait une service d'ambulancière dans notre salle depuis le 19 Septembre, assistant aux opérations et faisant des pansements sur des grands blessés.

Elle a fait preuve des capacités requises pour cet emploi et a montré le dévouement le plus sûr.

(Signed) GABRIELLE MAURICE LARROQUE.

J'ajoute ici, l'ayant omis, que Miss Campbell a soigné avec moi des typhiques, erysipèles gangrènes gazeuses et éminemment contagieux et ce, avec sang froid et courage.

GABRIELLE MAURICE LARROQUE.

(Stamp of Association des Dames Françaises, Croix Rouge, Française.)

Translation.

(Stamp of the Association des Dames Françaises.)

I, the undersigned Gabrielle Maurice Larroque, chief superintendent of ward C at the Auxiliary Hospital — of the Association des Dames Françaises), certify that Miss Campbell has served in our ward since September 19th, assisting at operations and doing the dressings in serious cases.

She has proved herself to have the necessary capacity for this work, and has shown the greatest devotion.

(Signed) GABRIELLE MAURICE LARROQUE.

I will add here, having omitted it before, that Miss Campbell has nursed with me cases of typhoid, erysipelas, gangrene-gaseous cases, and very contagious diseases, etc., with calmness and courage.

Copy of extract from letter.

“ Les blessés ont parlé des apparitions de Jeanne d'Arc après la bataille de la Marne. Ce serait dans les lieux qu'elle se serait de nouveau montrée avec S. Michel. Mais je sais que l'on a tout consigné de ces faits et que cela sera expliqué avec les dates les lieux et les témoignages irrefutables après la guerre—C'est tout ce que l'on peut dire pour la moment.

(Signed) GABRIELLE MAURICE LARROQUE,
Chef de Salle “ C.”

Translation.

“ The wounded have spoken of apparitions of Joan of Arc after the battle of the Marne. This would be in the same places where she showed herself again with St. Michael. But I know that all these facts have been recorded, and that the matter will be explained, with the dates, places, and irrefutable evidence, after the war.—That is all that one can say at the moment.”

(Signed) GABRIELLE MAURICE LARROQUE,
Superintendent of Ward “ C.”

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